

## **Response from Norway**

### **"Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development"**

#### **1. What measures have been taken to strengthen normative, legal and policy frameworks for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

The Norwegian Government periodically reports to the UN and annually reports to the Parliament on its progress on the sustainable development goals. The report "One Year Closer – 2019" was written by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance, with input from relevant Ministries. Stakeholders from civil society, business and industry, local government and academia have reported their efforts to promote the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development both nationally and internationally. See:

[https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/2030agenda\\_rapport2019.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/2030agenda_rapport2019.pdf)

The Ministry of Culture is responsible for following up measures associated with several of the targets, and has national responsibility for coordinating Sustainability Development Goal (SDG) 5, 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. All Ministries and sectors are responsible for promoting gender equality in their respective areas.

A comprehensive Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act entered into force 1 January 2018. The Act has replaced four former equality and anti-discrimination acts. The new act prohibits discrimination on grounds of gender, pregnancy, maternity/paternity leave in connection to birth or adoption, caring for children or close family members, ethnicity, religion, belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or age, or a combination of the abovementioned grounds.

The Act applies in all sectors of society and aims specifically at improving the position of women and minorities. The purpose of gathering the former acts in one legal framework is to make the legal protection against discrimination more accessible and thus more efficient. In addition, amendments have been made to ensure a stricter, more specific and more just regulation.

The Act requires public authorities, employers and employer and employee organisations to make active, targeted and systematic efforts to promote the purpose of the equality legislation in their undertakings.

The Act is enforced by the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal. The Tribunal has the authority to award compensation in discrimination cases within working life.

The Norwegian enforcement-system for discrimination cases was reorganized in 2018. The changes implied that the handling of complaints was transferred from the Equality- and Anti-Discrimination Ombud to a new Anti-Discrimination Tribunal. The Anti-Discrimination Tribunal is a low threshold alternative to the court system. The Tribunal handles most of the discrimination cases.

The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud shall work to promote genuine equality and prevent discrimination in all sectors of society on the basis of gender, pregnancy, leave in connection with childbirth or adoption, care responsibilities, ethnicity (which includes national origin, descent, skin colour and language), religion, belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and age. The Ombud has a consultative and advisory service for individuals as well as private and public enterprises.

The Ombud also monitors that Norwegian law and administrative practice are in accordance with Norway's obligations under UNCERD, UNCEDAW and UNCRPD. From 1 January 2020, the Ombud is given mandate to scrutinize the activity duty of public authorities and employers, as well as their new duties to issue a statement on their equality work according to the Equality and Anti-discrimination Act. The new provisions strengthen the Ombuds' role in this field. The Ombud will be entitled to make follow-up visits to enterprises and may require access to the enterprises' documentation relating to the employers' equality and anti-discrimination work.

In addition to The Anti-Discrimination Tribunal and The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, Norway has a national institution of human rights. The Norwegian National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) is mandated to promote and protect human rights nationally. NIM's areas of activity include work and welfare, children and families, discrimination and vulnerable groups, migration and citizenship, national minorities, religion and faith, indigenous peoples, school and education. NHRI was established in 2015. NHRI is intended to strengthen the implementation of human rights, in particular by monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in Norway, including making recommendations to ensure that Norway's human rights obligations are fulfilled, advising public bodies and private parties on the implementation of human rights, disseminating human rights information, including guidance for individuals on national and international complaint mechanisms, promoting training, education and research in the field of human rights, facilitating cooperation with relevant public bodies and other parties engaged in human rights work and participating in international cooperation to promote and protect human rights. NHRI shall not handle individual cases concerning human rights violations.

## **2. What actions and investments have been made for financing gender equality and the empowerment of women?**

As mentioned in the reply to question 1 the whole legal system for Equality and Anti-Discrimination has lately been reorganized and strengthened. The Government finances several projects that promotes gender equality.

## **3. What steps have been taken to bolster women's leadership and women's full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of sustainable development?**

The Norwegian labour market is gender segregated. Women and men have different positions in company hierarchies. Considerably more men than women have managerial positions, both among top executives and other leading positions. There has been a slight

increase in the proportion of women in all types of managerial positions in recent years. The changes in top executive positions are seen most clearly in the public sector. In 2017, women accounted for 41 per cent of top executives in public administration. Far fewer women are top executives in the private sector.

In 2020, 26 per cent of the 200 largest companies in Norway have women in the executive committees. There has been a small but positive change in the proportion of women among top executives in the same companies. There are significant gender differences in the type of managerial positions held by men and women. While there is virtually a gender balance in positions that support the management, known as staff positions, men dominate line positions. Line positions are operative positions with profit and loss responsibility, and examples of such positions are division heads and regional heads. Experience from such roles is often considered necessary in order to qualify for the highest position (CEO). Following the introduction of a statutory regulation requiring at least 40 per cent of each gender on the boards of public limited companies in 2003, the proportion of women on boards has increased considerably. Among the 200 largest companies, women account for 43 per cent of the board members in the companies covered by the Act. The figure for women on boards that are not subject to the statutory requirement is 19 per cent.

We will also mention CORE – Centre for Research on Gender Equality that conducts research on gender equality, with particular emphasis on gender equality challenges in working life in Norway. CORE is receiving financial support from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture.

See: <https://www.samfunnsforskning.no/core/english/>

**4. What macroeconomic, labour and social policies have been put in place that promote full and productive employment and decent work for women, in response to the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment and economic rights and independence?**

The Covid-19 outbreak has led to severe economic slowdown and uncertainty regarding future developments in the Norwegian economy. The Norwegian Government has introduced extensive measures through several emergency packages to secure jobs and to help businesses. The measures are universal as they target both men and women equally. In the first phases, the focus was mainly on compensating households' income loss and keeping viable businesses and industries afloat by supporting liquidity and credits, so that they can create jobs and growth when normal circumstances return. Strong fiscal response was supported by significant easing of monetary policy. Also the automatic stabilisers have been helpful, both the tax system and the quite generous and universal welfare system also prior to the crisis.

**5. What response and recovery measures to the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken to improve and expand social protection for women (e.g. healthcare coverage, unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, maternity benefits, pensions, income support such as cash transfers)?**

The healthcare systems in Norway are based on universal rights and they are designed to cover all people – young and old people, women and men. There have been no changes in the regulation of the healthcare systems or the healthcare coverage due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response to the corona pandemic, a number of social measures have been temporarily introduced, including:

- Extensive changes to the unemployment benefits scheme, including lowering the eligibility criteria, the level of compensation has increased for those with low income and the opportunities to take part in formal education whilst receiving unemployment benefits has increased.
- Additional amendments to the unemployment benefits scheme for temporarily laid-off workers, where the state takes a larger part of the pay obligations and secure a higher level of compensation for the temporarily laid-off worker.
- A three-day waiting period before unemployment benefits are paid, has been removed.
- Extended opportunity to combine work and benefits for benefit recipients who take up employment in agriculture, and forestry.
- New schemes to secure income to groups that normally are not covered by the existing unemployment benefit scheme (apprentices, self-employed and freelancers).
- The benefit period of unemployed workers who are approaching the end of the maximum period for unemployment benefits has been extended.
- Persons suspecting having covid-19 or in quarantine are granted sick-leave compensation. The employers' period for paying compensation for sick-leave as a result of the coronavirus outbreak has been reduced. Self-employed and freelancers will have sick-leave compensated from day 4 of their leave, on the same basis for coverage as before (normally from day 17).
- The quota for care allowance, a compensation for staying at home with children because of the closing of schools/kindergartens, has increased and the employers' compensation period for care allowances has been reduced.
- Exception from activity criteria in order to receive social assistance and benefits in the National Insurance Act.
- The maximum period for participation in the Qualification Programme, and for receiving qualification benefit, has been prolonged.
- Temporary tax reliefs and extensive postponements of payment deadlines, which in the short run provide significant improvements in the businesses liquidity.
- New guarantee and loan schemes for the businesses and industries.
- Compensation schemes for companies with a large drop in turnover due to the virus outbreak, and to cover expenses for statutory maintenance in seasonal businesses that have experienced a large drop in turnover.
- The Government has introduced a temporary salary compensation scheme for employers that bring their temporary laid off employees back to work

The validity periods of the measures vary, and are under continuous consideration. As the infection control measures are gradually eased, the existing financial measures must be adjusted and new measures introduced in order to get the economy up to speed, avoid in-locking effects and bring people back to work.

**6. What actions have been taken to expand the availability and affordability of care services to address the increase in unpaid care and domestic work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. care subsidies, paid leave)?**

There have been no changes in the regulation of the welfare system and the system of provision of health and care services due to the pandemic. The provision of health and care services is based on universal rights for patients and users, according to their needs. The responsibility for providing services is divided between the hospital trusts for specialized and hospital care, and by the municipalities for social and long-term care. The financing of the services is mainly a responsibility for the hospital trusts and the municipalities, with a limited level of out-of-pocket expenses.

There has been no a significant increase in waiting time for access to long-term care services, such as nursing homes or home-based care. The municipalities can give, by application, care allowances for relatives if they replace the municipal care services. Parents are accorded paid leave for caring for sick children, and relatives can ask for a welfare-leave for providing family care.

### **7. What action has been taken to increase resources and support for women's and civil society organizations as they cope with COVID-19 pandemic?**

Civil society organizations in Norway are in general well financed. So far civil society organizations in Norway have not received extra funding.

### **8. What steps have been taken to improve gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to track and monitor the gender-specific impacts and response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act gives public authorities a duty to work actively, purposefully and systematically to promote gender equality and prevent discrimination. The activity and reporting obligation obliges the Ministries to e.g. map the gender equality situation in their own administrative area and explain what they do to integrate gender equality considerations into their work. The Ministries shall prepare a well-thought-out gender equality policy in their administrative area.

We know that the crisis has different consequences for women and men. Violence in close relationships increases in crises and in isolation in the home. Women and men work in different parts of working life, and can therefore be affected differently. The increase in unpaid care work as a result of closed kindergartens and schools falls mostly on women.

The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has been commissioned to follow and map equality consequences of the pandemic on the basis of gender as well as other discrimination grounds and to report regularly on this. In addition, it is necessary for the different sector Ministries to assess gender equality consequences of the pandemic and of measures implemented within their own sector. Work, economy, health, school and violence in close relationships are areas where it is particularly important to follow developments closely in order to assess gender equality consequences and the need for adjustment of measures. Gender-disaggregated statistics within the various sectors will be important for effective response.

